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Another Setback For Demichev

Petr Demichev, Soviet Minister of Culture and a candidate member of the Politburo, did not receive the customary awards usually associated with the 60th or 70th birthdays of top Kremlin leaders at an award ceremony in the Kremlin on 5 January. With few exceptions during the past 18 years, party leaders have received an "Order of Lenin" and have been given the title "Hero of Socialist Labor" in connection with these two birthday celebrations. On his 60th birthday, Demichev was awarded only an "Order of the October Revolution," a lesser award than the "Order of Lenin"; he was not given a "Hero" title.

The political slight to Demichev contrasts sharply with the honors conferred on his leadership colleague, Uzbek Party First Secretary Rashidov, during the same award ceremony. Rashidov was accorded an "Order of Lenin" and given the title "Hero of Socialist Labor." Moreover, his award preceded the one given Demichev, although protocol for candidate Politburo members calls for awards to be distributed by alphabetical order. Finally, Brezhnev, who presented the awards, praised Rashidov's leadership role, but noted only that Demichev's award was for services to the party and state.

Demichev is the only member of the current leadership aged 60 or older who did not receive the "Hero" title. He is not the first leader in the Brezhnev period, however, whose political decline was registered by such a slight.

-- In 1970, Gennadiy Voronov, a full member of the Politburo and Chairman of the RSFSR Council of Ministers, was awarded an "Order of Lenin," but the title of "Hero of Socialist Labor" was not given. (Voronov is the only Politburo member since 1965 who did not receive this title on his 60th birthday.) Eleven months later he

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lost his position as head of the RSFSR government and was made Chairman of the People's Control Committee, clearly a loss of political status. Finally, in 1973 he was removed from the Politburo and retired.

- In September 1972, Vasiliy Mzhavanadze, party First Secretary of Georgia and a candidate member of the Politburo, was given the "Order of the October Revolution" on his 70th birthday. A few days later he was relieved of his position in Georgia, and after three months he was removed from the Politburo.

It has been evident for some time that Demichev's political star was declining. In 1974, he was unexpectedly made Minister of Culture and thereby lost his position in the Central Committee secretariat, a post that involved party supervision of cultural activities. Normally such a demotion would have led to removal from the Politburo, an event widely expected at the 25th Party Congress in 1976. Surprisingly, Demichev survived the Congress, retaining his position as a candidate member of the Politburo and even outranking his newly chosen replacement in the secretariat, Zimyanin. Clearly, Demichev's high political status, given his secondary administrative post, remains an anomaly. So is his association with various senior individuals within the leadership. He does not appear to have close supporters or obvious opponents. This latest setback indicates, nonetheless, that his political stock continues to decline.

The tradition of conferring awards on Politburo officials on the occasion of their 60th birthday could also provide the leadership with an opportunity to indicate whether Central Committee Secretary Kulakov or Ukrainian party First Secretary Shcherbitsky has improved his standing as a possible successor to Brezhnev. Both men, along with candidate member of the Politburo and Belorussian First Secretary Masherov, will be 60 next month.

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